

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL

THE Vedda country at the present day is limited to a roughly triangular tract lying between the eastern slopes of the central mountain *massif* and the sea. This area of about 2400 square miles is bounded on the west by the Mahaweli Ganga, from the point where, abandoning its eastern course through the mountains of the Central Province, the river sweeps northwards to the sea. A line from this great bend passing eastwards through Bibile village (on the Badulla-Batticaloa road) to the coast will define the southern limits of the Vedda country with sufficient accuracy, while its eastern limit is the coast. So defined it includes the greater part of the Eastern Province, about a fifth of Uva and a small portion of that part of the North Central Province known as Tamankaduwa, and is traversed by a single high road capable of taking wheeled traffic. This runs from Badulla, the capital of Uva, lying at the foot of the central mountain mass of the island, to the coast a few miles to the north of Batticaloa, the capital of the Eastern Province. [491]

Excepting only the mountain scenery of Upper Uva and the Central Province, the Vedda country even in its present diminished form presents every variety of scenery met with in Ceylon, including alike the magnificent Uva park lands and the sandy mangrove-fringed flats of the Eastern coast. Within its borders is situated Mahayangana (Alutnuwara) the ancient assembling place of the Yakkas where, according to the Mahawansa, Buddha appeared and struck terror into their hearts before propounding his doctrines to the hosts of *deva* who

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they had been called upon to pay a chena tax as well as 1'50 Rs. per adult male road tax. Of course they were unable to collect this money and they dreaded the ensuing penalty, that of serving on the roads, for should the two young men leave the settlement the old man and woman and the girl must starve, the first being too old to work and the woman a cripple. Their plight would have been just as bad had the young man gone to work on some Sinhalese rice fields in order to earn the money¹. 651

Degenerate Veddass in the neighbourhood of the main Badulla-Batticaloa road². The main road from Badulla to the east coast passes through country that was once the centre of the Vedirata, and on either side of it at a distance of some 2—6 miles are various settlements of half-bred and degenerate Veddass who will soon be entirely lost among the Sinhalese. Plate XIV, figure 1, represents two men of this class: it is obvious that the young man would pass for a Sinhalese, indeed in spite of his bow and arrows and traditional scanty Vedda garb the condition of his hair shows that he has at least been following a Sinhalese mode of life. It is possible that the whole Vedda get-up may have been assumed for our benefit, though in view of the comparative skill with which he handled his bow we do not think this likely. The old man was doubtless one of the last degenerate Veddass of the district. 177
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Before passing to village Veddass a word must be said concerning the Omuni folk and those of Unuwatura Bubula. Sir James Emerson Tennant, in his work *Ceylon* published in 1859, states that Mr Atherton, A.G.A., in conjunction with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries, attempted to civilise the Veddass³. In 1838 "cottages were built for them in their own district, rice land assigned to them, wells dug, coconuts planted, two communities were speedily settled at Vippammadva." A 177
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¹ This is a not uncommon practice at the present day.

² This road is only some forty or fifty years old, Mr Warren tells me that "the old road from Badulla to Batticaloa joined the road from Alutnuwara. It crossed the present cart road about Kallodi and must have worked its way in the neighbourhood of the present road to Tumpalancholai and so to the ferry into Batticaloa." Part of this track is still used as a short cut. "There was another road from Passera through Madagama past Mahakandiyawa to Mandar; *terrible* travel that way now." [491]

³ Tennant, *op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 447.